

INTELLIGENCER



BY SHARON CHURCHER
AND MARY MURPHY

Reagan's Envoy Reported in Talks With the P.L.O.

PRESIDENT REAGAN'S secretive ambassador-at-large, General Vernon Walters, has been meeting with Palestine Liberation Organization officials since 1982, sources close to the State Department claim.

Since 1975, successive administrations have pledged not to negotiate with or recognize the P.L.O. until it recognizes Israel's right to exist. Nonetheless, clandestine contacts have been

maintained through the C.I.A., and the Reagan administration was recently reported to have negotiated with P.L.O. leader Yasir Arafat through John Mroz, a private citizen.

In 1982, after the Mroz talks broke off, Walters met a top P.L.O. official in Morocco, said one well-placed source. Another source said Walters had another P.L.O. meeting this February. In telling an acquaintance

about the talks, Walters supposedly said, "I'm telling them that if they get in the way, we're going to kick their ass," apparently alluding to fears that the group would interfere with the withdrawal of U.S. Marines from Beirut. Around the beginning of March, Walters met Arafat in Jordan, this source added.

One of *New York's* sources defended this. "Very quiet talks with one's

enemies are not always counterproductive," he contended. Another pointed out that the 1975 pledge was supposed to give the P.L.O. an incentive to recognize Israel. "That is being undermined," he maintained.

Walters couldn't be reached for comment, but his executive assistant, Nancy Lewis, categorically denied that Walters had had any P.L.O. meetings as ambassador-at-large.